AYAC NATIONAL SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH WORK 2013

BY ELIZABETH REIMER, PHD  |  MAY 2013
ABOUT AYAC

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia’s non-government youth affairs peak body, which represents young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC represents a diverse membership of State and Territory youth peak bodies, national youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field

AYAC and its members are committed to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AYAC wishes to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of country across Australia, and their continuing connection to their land, culture and community. It is on this land where youth work happens. We pay our respects to elders past, present and future.

AYAC celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and all they give to our society. We recognise that all our success as a nation are built upon a land with a rich history that spans many thousands of years.

Our shared history fills us with pride in what we have all achieved, sorrow over the many injustices that continue until the present day, and hope that together we can build a stronger and fairer future.

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AYAC wishes to acknowledge our funding body, the Office for Youth in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, our hardworking AYAC staff members Andrew Cummings, Reynato Reodica, Jacqui McKenzie, Kieran Adair and Roslyn Venables, our good natured friends at Boheem Design, as well as AYAC’s Policy Advisory Council members for their advice and guidance and our sister youth peaks in each state/territory for getting the word out to their networks.

Finally, AYAC applauds all the wonderful youth workers around Australia who took the time to undertake the survey. This one’s for you.

Dr Reimer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Associate Professor Mark Hughes for data analysis support, Ms Samantha Kendal for proofreading and the team in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University.
The AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 has been created to address this gap in our collective knowledge of youth work and build a solid evidence based to assist in driving forward positive changes for young Australians and the sector that supports them.

The AYAC Snapshot 2013 will provide a strong foundation for the work of AYAC work in the coming years as it represents the interests and needs of the youth work sector across Australia, significantly contributing to the following goals in the AYAC Strategic Plan 2011 – 2015:

**Strategy Two: Support the Sector**

The knowledge contained in the AYAC Snapshot 2013 will contribute to our goal of a youth support sector that is unified, well-resourced and professional. It contributes to debates on key industry issues including continuing education and professional development, pay and conditions, the recognition of youth work and promotes the importance of the unique role that youth workers and the youth sector play in the lives of young people. The AYAC Snapshot will allow AYAC to better advocate for and support the development of a national youth sector workforce development framework and lobby governments to ensure the sector is appropriately resourced and recognised.

**Strategy Four: Drive Research for Better Practice**

The AYAC Snapshot 2013 represents our major contribution to our goal of undertaking and supporting research and development activities that lead to better services for young Australians. The AYAC Snapshot is an important collaboration between AYAC and the research sector, undertaking insightful research about the sector that supports young people, guided by our membership of youth support services. The research places AYAC at the cutting edge of issues facing the youth sector across Australia and builds upon our reputation as experts on issues affecting young people and the youth sector.

This summary report is also available in pdf on the AYAC website, along with the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report, which contains even more data and useful information. See http://www.ayac.org.au/projects/AYACsnapshot2013.html for further information and downloads. We hope you find this information useful.
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The AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 (AYAC Snapshot) is an Australia-wide profile of the Youth Work sector. Believed to be the first nationwide exploration of the Australian youth work workforce, the AYAC Snapshot presents a robust profile of those employed in the Youth Work sector across Australia, where youth workers are employed to work with young people aged 12-26 years.

Chapter 2 – Demographics, provides the basic demographic information gleaned from the data. This includes characteristics of youth workers throughout Australia such as age, gender, cultural background, and locations of work (in terms of urban, regional, rural/remote locations).

Chapter 3 – Employment Profile, addresses issues concerning employment options for youth workers across Australia, and includes how youth workers identify themselves by title, the types of organisations they work for, and the types of employment contracts workers are employed under. It also includes the kind of work conducted in a typical week and the kinds of issues workers might expect to address when working with young people.

Chapter 4 – Workforce Sustainability, relates to issues of sustainability of a youth work career, such as how the sector supports workers in terms of remuneration, professional development and supervision. It also includes respondents’ motivations for becoming youth workers, satisfaction regarding working in the sector and ideas about longevity in the Youth Work sector across Australia.

Chapter 5 – Improving Youth Work, provides the qualitative data on worker perceptions of the youth sector across Australia, and their suggestions for how it might be improved.

As such, it is designed to contribute knowledge of the Australian youth sector workforce to assist the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) to progress its social policy mandates in developing the Youth Work sector across Australia. Benefits to the respondents include providing AYAC with current and relevant information about the Youth Work sector across Australia, which AYAC will use to continue advocating for ongoing government and community support of the youth work profession across Australia.

The following report provides selected findings of this research, which AYAC will use to develop discussion and response with government, the community, private stakeholders, young people and the Youth Work sector across the country.

The AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report, which includes the research methodology and further findings can be found on the AYAC website – http://www.ayac.org.au/projects/AYACSnapshot2013.html

The chapters that follow present the findings of the research for each question asked in the survey, limiting an account of the data to an overview level. It does not include detail pertaining to the specific regions less than at a State and Territory level across Australia.
A cross-sectional survey design and self-report questionnaire, were utilised to gather descriptive data on youth workers working across the youth services sector throughout Australia. The anonymous survey for individual youth workers to complete was available for completion from 14 December 2012 until 7 February 2013.

The total number of youth workers across Australia eligible to complete the survey is unknown, where, as previously noted, eligible workers were paid workers who were employed to provide support and/or development opportunities for young people aged 12 - 26 years, and who identify as youth workers.

However, 1725 people began the survey and of these 1563 met the eligibility criteria. In addition to those eligible, 56 respondents reported they were volunteering in such positions in an unpaid capacity, 78 reported that this is the kind of work they have conducted previously and would like to again, and 28 reported having not undertaken such work but hoping in the future. Three-quarters of the eligible respondents completed more than half of the questions and their results were used for analysis (75.8%, n=1563). The following reports only on the profile of these 1185 respondents employed in youth work positions at the time of the survey.


CHAPTER 2 – Demographics

This chapter reports on the findings of the research on basic demographic information relating to youth workers across Australia. This includes age, gender, cultural background and languages spoken with young people at work, work locations by State and Territory and a range of urban and rural contexts, experience and qualifications.

AGE

Youth workers were asked to identify their age and the responses were grouped into the categories outlined in Figure 1. As shown, at the time the survey was conducted, 16% of the respondents were 25 years or under (n=1039), where the two youngest respondents were 18 years old at the time of the survey. Almost one-quarter were aged 26-30 years (23.9%, n=1039). Of the 54 respondents over 55 years of age at the time of the survey, eighteen were 60 or more years old, where four respondents were 65-66 years old. Furthermore, at this time, the average age was 35 years, where the two most common ages of workers were 27 and 28 years (5.6% and 5.0% respectively, n=1039).

GENDER

Youth workers were asked whether they were Female, Male, or preferred not to say. Just over two-thirds of respondents were Female (67.9%) and approximately one-third were Male 32.1% (n=1135). Fifty respondents preferred not to provide their gender.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Youth workers were asked if they were from an Aboriginal background, Torres Strait Islander background, or both. Respondents were also asked to indicate if they were born in a region of the world outside of Australia and, if so, which region.

Most respondents reported only speaking English when speaking with young people at work (93.5%, n=1168), while only one person reported that they do not speak English at all at work. Just over 6% speak English and other languages when speaking with young people at work.

Of those respondents who indicated that they speak English and languages other than English with young people while at work, 44 reported speaking one or more Australian Indigenous languages (3.7% of total respondents, n=1168), 18 an Arabic language, 5 a Chinese language, and 3 reported using sign languages. Other languages spoken with young people at work include Spanish, a variety of African languages, French, Japanese, Maori, Pacific Islander languages and languages from a variety of other South East Asian and European countries. No respondents indicated speaking languages from North America, or Central America and the Caribbean.

More details on this, including a breakdown of places of birth of youth workers, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.
WORK LOCATIONS

As represented in Figure 2, the greatest number of respondents worked in New South Wales and Victoria (29.1% and 26.0% respectively, n=1180), where the least number worked the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Australian Capital Territory (4.0%, 4.0% and 2.8% respectively, n=1180).

Respondents were asked to select the options within a table that best described where they focus their work. They could select “capital city”, “major metropolitan city”, “regional city, town and/or area”, “rural town and/or area”, and “remote or very remote town and/or area” as they defined these terms. Since they were able to select as many options as suited their situation, some respondents reported working in more than one geographical location, including across more than one State or Territory. Hence, the numbers cannot be totalled across rows or columns.

As shown in Table 1, youth workers were employed to work with young people across a variety of population area types. This includes highly urbanised capital and metropolitan cities, more sparsely population regional and rural areas, and remote and very remote town across all States and Territories. Very few respondents focused their work across all of Australia, including across all States and Territories and all urban and rural locations (less than 1% for all population areas, n=1185). At the other end of the spectrum, the highest percentage of respondents worked in major metropolitan cities throughout Victoria and in regional NSW (both 11.5%, n=1185).

Within the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia most respondents worked in the capital city (2.4%, 4.0% and 7.8% respectively, n=1185). Within Queensland and Victoria, most respondents worked in major metropolitan cities (4.7% and 11.5% respectively, n=1185), while in New South Wales and Tasmania, most respondents worked in regional cities, towns and/or areas (11.5% and 1.8% respectively, n=1185). It was only in the Northern Territory that most respondents worked in remote or very remote towns and/or areas (2.2%, n=1185).

FIGURE 2: The percentage distribution of surveyed youth workers according to States and Territories (n=1180).
(n.b. rounded to the nearest percentage)
TABLE I: The distribution of work locations of surveyed youth workers across Australia, including States and Territories according to region (n=1185)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACROSS ALL OF AUSTRALIA</th>
<th>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</th>
<th>NEW SOUTH WALES</th>
<th>NORTHERN TERRITORY</th>
<th>QUEENSLAND</th>
<th>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</th>
<th>TASMANIA</th>
<th>VICTORIA</th>
<th>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAPITAL CITY</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
<td>29 (2.4)</td>
<td>85 (7.2)</td>
<td>18 (1.5)</td>
<td>25 (2.1)</td>
<td>47 (4.0)</td>
<td>17 (1.4)</td>
<td>104 (8.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAJOR METROPOLITAN CITY</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
<td>108 (9.1)</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>56 (4.7)</td>
<td>28 (2.4)</td>
<td>9 (0.8)</td>
<td>136 (11.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGIONAL CITY, TOWN AND DIOR AREA</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>136 (11.5)</td>
<td>17 (1.4)</td>
<td>42 (3.5)</td>
<td>24 (2.0)</td>
<td>21 (1.8)</td>
<td>98 (8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RURAL TOWN AND OR AREA</td>
<td>5 (0.4)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>101 (8.5)</td>
<td>14 (1.2)</td>
<td>14 (1.2)</td>
<td>19 (1.6)</td>
<td>12 (1.0)</td>
<td>62 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REMOTE OR VERY REMOTE TOWN AND OR AREA</td>
<td>6 (0.5)</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
<td>27 (2.3)</td>
<td>26 (2.2)</td>
<td>4 (0.3)</td>
<td>11 (0.9)</td>
<td>9 (0.8)</td>
<td>21 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXPERIENCE

Regarding experience, respondents were asked to report the number of years they have worked in youth work positions. Figure 3 shows that just under two-thirds of respondents have worked between 2 and 10 years in youth work (61.3%, n=1185). Furthermore, almost half the respondents had five and fewer years’ experience, with a third of these having less than 2 years’ experience in youth work. Furthermore, almost half the respondents had five and fewer years’ experience, with a third of these having less than 2 years or less experience in youth work. Having said this, 28.6% of respondents have 6-10 years’ experience and nearly a quarter (23.2%) have over 11 years or more experience (n=1185).

FIGURE 3: The percentage distribution of the number of years surveyed youth workers have worked in youth work (n=1185)
Almost 85% of respondents reported having been employed in other types of jobs prior to working in youth work, with 15.3% of all respondents answering that youth work was their first job (n=1185). Furthermore, almost 23% of respondents had worked in other types of social and human services jobs previously. Apart from these, the most common occupations youth workers had previously undertaken included retail and hospitality jobs, and completing qualifications as students (30.5% and 28.3% of respondents respectively). Furthermore, it is clear that the Youth Work sector employs people with quite an eclectic range of previous employment experience. This includes small numbers of workers having worked in creative arts (2.6%), police and/or defence (2.3%), outdoor sports and recreational work (1.1%), business (1.1%), law (0.8%) and a mix of other jobs including banking and accountancy, communications/journalism, government positions, human/public relations, information technology, research, security, transport and tourism.

QUALIFICATIONS

Most respondents had completed post-secondary school qualifications (94.6%, n=1176). Of the respondents, 9.8% had completed a TAFE Certificate I or II, 40.1% a TAFE Certificate III or IV, 40.4% a Diploma, 7.6% an Advanced Diploma, 48.2% a university Bachelor degree (with or without Honours), and 17.1% a post graduate university degree (n=1176, where values total more than 100% due to some studying more than one qualification) (Figure 4).

Over one-third of respondents had specialist youth work qualifications (39.2%, n=1176), ranging from Certificate III/IV to post-Graduate qualifications in youth work.

In addition, 44.6% of respondents said their qualifications related to the human sciences more broadly; such as social work, social welfare, community development, social science and psychological sciences (n=1176)

More details on this, including information on specialist youth work and human services qualifications, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.

One-third of respondents were studying, at the time of the survey, for a formal qualification (33.9%, n=1154). Respondents were studying across a wide range of qualifications and disciplines. For example,

- 5.6% were studying a Certificate III or IV (including youth work = 1.3%, social science-related = 0.8% and psychological science-related = 0.2%)
- 7.3% were completing a Diploma or Advanced Diploma (youth work = 1.4%, social science-related = 1.7% and psychological science-related = 1.7%)
- 11.9% were completing a university Bachelor degree (with or without Honours) (youth work = 3.2%, social science-related = 4.8% and psychological science-related = 1.4%)
- 8% were completing a post graduate university degree (youth work = 1.2%, social science-related = 2.2% and psychological science-related = 1.9%) (n=1185).

The respondents who were studying at the time of the survey rated on a five-point scale the extent to which a number of statements described why they are studying (see Table 2). Just over half agreed that they were motivated to study at the moment as doing so will help them gain a pay rise/promotion within the Youth Work sector (54.1%, n=373). It is noteworthy that while 44.2% agreed that they are studying because they would like to join a professional association, the
TABLE 2: Rating of reasons why surveyed youth workers are currently studying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>I AGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>TOTAL n =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO UPGRADE MY SKILLS / QUALIFICATIONS</td>
<td>278 (68.8)</td>
<td>113 (28.0)</td>
<td>6 (1.5)</td>
<td>6 (1.5)</td>
<td>1 (0.3)</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN SKILLS SPECIFIC TO WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE</td>
<td>142 (37.1)</td>
<td>148 (38.6)</td>
<td>43 (11.2)</td>
<td>45 (11.7)</td>
<td>5 (1.3)</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION</td>
<td>74 (19.9)</td>
<td>90 (24.2)</td>
<td>106 (28.6)</td>
<td>74 (19.9)</td>
<td>27 (7.3)</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOING THIS WILL HELP ME GAIN A PAY RISE AND I OR PROMOTION WITHIN THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR</td>
<td>84 (22.5)</td>
<td>118 (31.6)</td>
<td>54 (14.5)</td>
<td>82 (22.0)</td>
<td>35 (9.4)</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOING THIS WILL HELP ME GAIN ANOTHER POSITION IN THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR</td>
<td>94 (25.0)</td>
<td>144 (38.3)</td>
<td>68 (18.1)</td>
<td>55 (14.6)</td>
<td>15 (4.0)</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOING THIS WILL HELP ME MOVE TO ANOTHER SECTOR</td>
<td>58 (15.7)</td>
<td>122 (33.0)</td>
<td>78 (21.1)</td>
<td>84 (22.7)</td>
<td>28 (7.5)</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY EMPLOYER WANTS ME TO DO IT</td>
<td>34 (9.2)</td>
<td>95 (25.7)</td>
<td>64 (17.3)</td>
<td>103 (27.8)</td>
<td>74 (20)</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

remainder were fairly evenly split between disagreeing with this reason or having no opinion about this being the reason (27.2% and 28.6% respectively, n=371).

Of the respondents who were not currently studying (see Table 3), over half of the respondents agreed that they would like to complete further study (54.8%, n=640). This interest in increasing formal qualifications is supported by the small number of respondents who thought studying was not worth the time and effort because any wage increase they may gain is not worth the effort (25.3%, n=648). With this in mind, two-thirds of the respondents reported that their workplace would support them to complete further study (where only 15.9% agreed with the statement, “I would like to but am not supported to in my workplace”, n=651). Rather than lack of workplace support, the majority of respondents answering these questions agreed that of the suggestions available, lack of time was the biggest barrier to study (74.0% agreed and 9.1% had no opinion, n=667), closely followed by limited financial capacity to participate (68.2% agreed and 13.4% had no opinion, n=666). The other two choices related to accessing study opportunities were considered much less of an issue than lack of time and money. Approximately one-quarter of respondents agreed that finding appropriate youth work specific courses, and courses near where they live were issues (25.2%, n=640 and 22.5%, n=636 respectively). Furthermore, more respondents selected the “no opinion” option as their reason for not studying than they did for the time and money options. Finally, 28.8% agreed they were not currently studying because they have recently completed studies so do not need to do any more just at the moment, but half (50.8%) felt that they disagreed that this was the case for them (n=653).
### TABLE 3: Rating of reasons why surveyed youth workers are not currently studying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>I AGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>TOTAL n =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY MORE BUT IT IS TOO EXPENSIVE</td>
<td>219 (32.9)</td>
<td>235 (35.3)</td>
<td>89 (13.4)</td>
<td>36 (5.4)</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY MORE BUT DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH TIME</td>
<td>187 (28.0)</td>
<td>307 (46.0)</td>
<td>61 (9.1)</td>
<td>32 (4.8)</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT IS NOT WORTH THE TIME AND EFFORT TO STUDY MORE – ANY WAGE INCREASE I MIGHT GAIN IS NOT WORTH IT</td>
<td>42 (6.5)</td>
<td>122 (18.8)</td>
<td>133 (20.5)</td>
<td>212 (32.7)</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS RELEVANT COURSES AND TRAINING PROVIDERS SPECIFIC TO YOUTH WORK</td>
<td>28 (4.4)</td>
<td>133 (20.8)</td>
<td>151 (23.6)</td>
<td>246 (38.4)</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT AM NOT SUPPORTED TO IN MY WORKPLACE</td>
<td>21 (3.2)</td>
<td>83 (12.7)</td>
<td>120 (18.4)</td>
<td>275 (42.2)</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I AM NOT INTERESTED IN DOING ANY MORE STUDY AT THE MOMENT</td>
<td>74 (11.2)</td>
<td>137 (20.1)</td>
<td>89 (13.4)</td>
<td>253 (38.2)</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS RELEVANT COURSES AND TRAINING PROVIDERS WHERE I LIVE</td>
<td>46 (7.2)</td>
<td>97 (15.3)</td>
<td>119 (18.7)</td>
<td>257 (40.4)</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I HAVE RECENTLY COMPLETED STUDIES SO DO NOT NEED TO DO ANY MORE JUST AT THE MOMENT</td>
<td>77 (11.8)</td>
<td>111 (17.0)</td>
<td>133 (20.4)</td>
<td>226 (34.6)</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3 – Career Options

This chapter reports on the type of employment options available to youth workers across Australia. This includes the type of labels/titles youth workers are known by, organisations they work for, and employment contracts they work under and have previously experienced. It also reports on the number of hours youth workers have worked when employed in various contracts, including what they were actually contracted to work compared to both paid and unpaid overtime work conducted. Finally, the chapter includes information about the time youth workers spent on tasks and the kinds of issues young people sought assistance about.

FIGURE 5: The percentage distribution of the types of organisations surveyed youth workers work for (n=1170)

- **60.2%** - Non-government / not-for-profit organisation
- **36.9%** - Government organisation (including local government)
- **2.9%** - Other organisations

TITLE OF POSITION AND TYPE OF ORGANISATION

There were 574 different position titles given, ranging from very general, such as “youth worker”, “case manager” and “case worker” to very specific, indicating the very eclectic way in which youth workers across Australia identify themselves.

At the time of the survey, most of the respondents were employed in one organisation in one youth work job (83.3%, n=1180), with just over 5% of respondents employed in more than one organisation but only engaged in 1 youth work job, and less than 1% self-employed (5.1% and 0.8% respectively). In addition, 11% of respondents were engaged in more than one youth work job (n=1180), with most of these employed in two youth work jobs (89.7%, n=68) and none indicating they were employed in more than three youth work jobs.

Figure 5 shows that approximately two-thirds of respondents worked for a non-government organisation (63.1%, n=1170), with most of these working for a non-profit making non-government organisation (95.4%, n=738).
They were asked to estimate how many of these positions were either casual, part time fixed / short term contract, full time fixed / short term contract, permanent part time, permanent full time, voluntary, and/or self-employed. Almost two-thirds of respondents had worked in permanent full time youth work positions (61.6%, n=1173) where just over one-third have worked in permanent part time youth work positions (37.3%, n=1178). Likewise, just over one-third have worked in casual jobs over their youth work career (38.3%, n=1179), where most of these (28.2%, n=1179) have held 1-2 casual positions. Approximately one-quarter of respondents have held part time and/or fulltime contract positions (24.7%, n=1174 and 23.2%, n=1185 respectively) and 29.4% have worked as volunteer youth workers (n=1162) where 4% have been self-employed in youth work positions (n=1184).

Furthermore, most respondents were employed in 1-2 youth work jobs over all types of employment situations over their careers, where some, albeit it few, have experienced eleven or more jobs across the various types of employment situations.

Respondents were also asked to report the number of hours worked during the week prior to completing the survey across various types of employment contracts. This data is shown in the tables below, where Table 4 refers to the ordinary paid hours worked, and Table 5 refers to the unpaid overtime hours worked. Regarding the number of hours conducted across the various types of work, approximately 10% of respondents worked in casual youth work positions during the week before they completed the survey (10.4%), where 5.6% of respondents completed 30 or more hours as casual employees (n=1148). Very few respondents worked unpaid overtime in a casual position during the week before they completed the survey (3.1%, n=1173).

Almost 15% of respondents worked on a contract (either a fixed term or short term), where 7.5% worked between 35 and 43 hours last week and 9 people (0.8% worked more than 60 and up to 80 hours) (n=1182). In addition, 3.0% of those working on a contract worked paid overtime hours (n=1184), where over 5% worked unpaid overtime while on a contract (5.2%, n=1185).

Almost one-quarter of respondents worked on a permanent part time basis during the week before they completed the survey (23.6%, n=1180). Furthermore, 11.5% of respondents worked 15-29 hours and 8.9% worked between 30 and 39 hours (n=1180) permanent part time. One per cent worked 40 or more hours permanent part time in the week prior to completing the survey, the greatest number of hours being 74 (n=1180). Furthermore, 5.3% received paid overtime while working permanent part time (n=1184), while 7% did not receive payment for the overtime work they completed, where most worked up to 7 hours unpaid overtime (6.1%), however 1 person worked 22 hours unpaid overtime (n=1183).

At 52%, just over half of the respondents worked on a permanent full time basis during the week before they completed the survey, however, 2.5% of respondents worked less than 30 hours during the week prior to the survey (n=1178). Most of those working permanent full time worked 30-39 hours (78.0%), while 17.6% worked 40 hours (n=613). Fifteen per cent of the respondents working on a permanent full time basis completed paid overtime (n=1180) while just over fifteen per cent of those employed on a permanent full time basis completed unpaid overtime (16.9%, n=1180). Of those permanent full time employees who worked unpaid overtime in the week prior to completing the survey, almost three-quarters worked between one and seven hours, just under one-quarter worked 8-14 hours without pay, while the three remaining worked 15 or more hours unpaid overtime (70.5%, 24%, 5.5% respectively, n=200).

Finally, 1.2% of respondents were in self-employed positions in youth work (n=1185). Furthermore, over one-third of respondents would like to work more paid hours in youth work than they currently do (37.6%, n=1096). More details on this, including the percentages of different types of contracts in the employment history of respondents and analysis of paid overtime worked by respondents, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.

**Types of Employment Contracts**

Regarding types of employment contracts youth workers experience, respondents were asked to think about their youth work career, and all the youth work jobs they have had over this career, despite how long each job was held.

Part time was defined as working less than 35 hours per week and full time was defined as working 35 hours or more per week.

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**TABLE 4:** The distribution of ordinary paid work hours completed by surveyed youth workers during the week prior to the survey in different types of employment situations (not including overtime)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT SITUATION</th>
<th>HOURS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed on a casual basis</td>
<td>1029 (89.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed on a contract (either fixed term or short term)</td>
<td>1009 (85.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed on a permanent part time basis</td>
<td>901 (76.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed on a permanent full time basis</td>
<td>565 (48.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>1156 (98.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self employed</td>
<td>1171 (98.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were asked to report on how many hours they conducted various types of activities in a typical week.

These tasks, as shown in Table 6, were working directly with young people, with other professionals focused on issues for young people, or on administrative tasks, research/policy tasks relating to young people’s issues or management tasks. Tasks unrelated to these, and listed as “other”, involved driving to activities or providing work-related transport, cleaning, planning activities/tasks, and sleep over shifts.

Most respondents reported that in a typical week they worked directly with young people for the vast majority of the time (95.5%, n=1174), which involved tasks such as providing a service to young people, attending services with young people, and running group work sessions. The most common number of hours of direct work was typically 15 to 21 hours per week (31.1%). A fifth reported typically working directly with young people more than this (20.4%), however almost half worked less than 15 hours directly with young people (48.4%, n=1174, including those 53 respondents who did not work directly with young people at all).

Again, most respondents reported that in a typical week they worked with other professionals focused on issues for young people (88.5%). Such tasks included networking, working on partnerships / collaborations, and sharing resources with other workers / organisation. By far most worked 1 – 7 hours per week (63.2%) and only 1 per cent worked more than 21 hours with other professionals (1.2%, n=1170).

Almost all respondents reported conducting some administration tasks, such as filling out forms / applying for grants, attending meetings, in a typical week (94.5%). Most reported conducting between 1 hour and 14 hours administration, where 44.8% reported they completed 1-7 hours and 36.1% reported they completed 8-14 hours in a typical week. Only 1.9% reported they completed more than 21 hours administration in a typical week. (n=1173).

Research and policy tasks relating to young people issues included conducting local research into youth issues, and advocating for changes to government policies affecting young people. Where 42.9% reported they did not spend any time on such activities in a typical week, just over one half of respondents (51.0%) reported they typically spend between 1 and 7 hours on such activities each week (n=1164).

Management tasks, such as supervising staff, and conducting both professional development activities and sector development, were reported to be undertaken by 58.1% of respondents in a typical week. Most of those reporting such activities estimated spending 1-7 hours per week on them (42.4%, n=1166).
The ten most commonly reported issues that young people regularly sought youth worker assistance for were:

1. Education (59.5%, n=1144)
2. Mental health (54.3%, n=1141)
3. Behaviour management (48.4%, n=1121)
4. Income support/social security (46.1%, n=1118)
5. Drugs (43%, n=1129)
6. Housing/homelessness (41.5%, n=1110)
7. Alcohol (38.3%, n=1133)
8. Family relationships (but not including when they are parents themselves) (37.4%, n=1120)
9. Domestic and/or family violence (32.7%, n=1123)
10. General health (33.1%, n=1100)

The ten issues reported by respondents most as being raised by young people least often, that is, raised by young people only maybe a couple of times per year were:

1. Difficulties due to being young carers (35.6%, n=1087)
2. Consumer protection (33.8%, n=1055)
3. Gambling issues (33.0%, n=1056)
4. Disability (31.6%, n=1071)
5. Sexual assault (28.4%, n=1091)
6. Same-sex attracted / sex and gender diverse issues (26.9%, n=1069)
7. Difficulties due to being refugees / asylum seekers (25.9%, n=1087)
8. Out of home care, including transitions from out of home care (25.6%, n=1081)
9. Pregnancy and young parenting (23.4%, n=1099)
10. Sexual health (17.3%, n=1096)

More information on employment contracts, including distribution of paid overtime worked by respondents is contained in the AYAC National Snapshot 2013 - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.
FIGURE 6: Rating by surveyed youth workers of the kind of issues young people seek assistance about

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>REGULARLY</th>
<th>OFTEN</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>NOT OFTEN</th>
<th>NEVER HAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol issues</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour issues</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and protection</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer protection</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and/or family violence</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug issues</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational issues</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency assistance</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationship support (not when they are young parents)</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex attracted / sex and gender diverse issues</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General health issues</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing / homelessness</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income support / social security</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health – eg. Depression, anxiety, suicide related issues</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of home care, including transitions from oohc</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy and young parenting</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties due to being refugees / asylum seekers</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual health</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting access to recreational activities</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties due to being young carers</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth justice issues</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013
CHAPTER 4 – Workforce Sustainability

This chapter reports on the findings of the study relating to remuneration, ongoing professional development, support and supervision, motivation, satisfaction, and perceived career lifespan.

REMUNERATION

Respondents selected their gross annual wage from a number of categories. As shown in Figure 7, while youth workers were represented across all wage categories, most youth workers earned $52,000 - $77,999 annual gross wage (41%, n=1171).

Over half the respondents reported earning less than $51,999 gross income per year (52.9%, n=1171) (see. Just over two-thirds of respondents earned $41,600-$77,999 per year gross income (68.1%, n=1171). Only 6.1% earned over $78,000 per year (annual gross wage).

![Figure 7: The percentage distribution of annual wages of surveyed youth workers by below average, average and above average annual wage brackets (n=1171)](image)

ON GOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Three-quarters of respondents had attended work-related professional development training in the past 12 months (75.5%, n=1185). Six respondents attended professional development more than 15 times, with one respondent attending professional development training 17, 22, 25 and 40 times respectively, and two people reporting attendance as 20 times in the past 12 months.

Professional development training was fully funded by the respondent’s employer on most occasions (71.4%), where it was reported as partly funded by the respondent’s employer 12% of the time, and self-funded 7.1% of the time (n=1101). The other most common ways such training was funded were that it was free or funded by another organisation (written in the “other” column by 39 and 21 of respondents respectively).

The most common reasons for not attending professional development training included not having enough time to attend or hearing about any courses (both 16.4%) and having no management support to attend (13.7%). These figures are based on respondents who indicated they were not attending professional development training (n=146). Other common reasons for non-attendance at such training included being either not employed in the current job, or newly employed in the job, engaging in other forms of youth work education, and being away from work at the time.

More details on professional development, including number of occasions of attendance at professional development within the past 12 months, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.

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**PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT/SUPERVISION**

8.4% of respondents did not receive supervision on any occasion in the past 12 months, most received supervision at least once every three months (81.7%, n=1163). The most common supervision model was monthly (30%, n=1163).

Furthermore, of the respondents who received supervision at least once a week, five reported receiving daily supervision. In addition, three reported supervision being offered as needed, where one worker commented that this occurs over the phone as it cannot occur in person due to remoteness, and two respondents noted that had to find their own supervision.

More details on supervision, including the frequency of supervision for youth worker respondents, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.

**MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION WITH YOUTH WORK**

Respondents could choose one of a number of reasons why they became a youth worker. The options were because:

- they wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people
- they were motivated by a personal experience
- the work matched their skills and knowledge
- the work matched their values
- they wanted to work at a particular organisation
- it appealed to them as a challenging and rewarding career option
- there were no other employment options where they were living at the time
- they just fell into it
- they don’t know why

Most respondents provided a clear response as to why they became youth workers, where only one answered they did not know why (n=1183). Most respondents reported choosing youth work because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people (42.3%, n=1183). In addition, 2.7% respondents selected “other” and provided reasons such as wanting to work with a particular target group of people, because it provided an opportunity to work in their own community and because they were motivated by someone they knew or respected encouraging them (n=1183).

More details on worker satisfaction, including the reasons why youth workers entered into the sector, are contained on the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report on the AYAC website.

As shown in Table 7, the respondents overwhelmingly reported being satisfied with their main youth work job. Key indicators for satisfaction seemed to relate to a sense of pride in the work they do (96.2%, n=1158), the varied and interesting nature of this work (93.2%, n=1159), and enjoying working with co-workers (93.1%, n=1158). Other factors that respondents seemed to equate with positive satisfaction related to a supportive work environment. In line with this, 85.5% of respondents agreed that their boss was supportive (n=1152), and just over three-quarters agreed that their working conditions were satisfactory, and that they have the right balance between choosing what work they can do and what their boss wants them to do (76.2%, n=1157 and 75.8%, n=1158 respectively). In addition, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that they feel supported and respected by their local community (64.4%, n=1154) and just over one half agreed that access to training and development specific to youth work issues is satisfactory (56.9%, n=1156).

Furthermore, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that their work is stressful (65.9%, n=1156). This might be related to having too much to do, a statement which just over half of respondents agreed with and just over one-quarter disagreed with (53% and 27.3% respectively, n=1157). In addition, just over half of respondents felt there were not enough workers employed at the workplace to deal with the workload (51.9%), however just under half disagreed, perceiving there were enough workers (40.2%, n=1155).

Finally, just under half of the respondents agreed they were satisfied with their career options in youth work (48.7%) however, over one-third are not (35.6%; n=1156). Around one-third were satisfied with their pay (36.6%), where 55.4% reported feeling unsatisfied about their pay (n=1160).
### Table 7: Rating by surveyed youth workers of satisfaction with the conditions and type of work experienced as youth workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I Agree Very Much</th>
<th>I Agree</th>
<th>I Have No Opinion</th>
<th>I Disagree</th>
<th>I Disagree Very Much</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Am Satisfied with My Job</td>
<td>316 (27.4)</td>
<td>677 (58.7)</td>
<td>74 (6.4)</td>
<td>80 (6.9)</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>1154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Satisfied with My Pay</td>
<td>80 (6.9)</td>
<td>345 (29.7)</td>
<td>93 (8.0)</td>
<td>401 (34.6)</td>
<td>241 (20.8)</td>
<td>1160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Satisfied with the Working Conditions I Experience in This Job</td>
<td>237 (20.5)</td>
<td>644 (55.7)</td>
<td>82 (7.0)</td>
<td>154 (13.3)</td>
<td>40 (3.5)</td>
<td>1157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have the Right Balance Between Choosing What Work I Can Do and What My Boss Wants Me to Do</td>
<td>248 (21.4)</td>
<td>630 (54.4)</td>
<td>125 (10.7)</td>
<td>127 (11.0)</td>
<td>28 (2.4)</td>
<td>1158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Work I Get to Do as a Youth Worker is Varied and Interesting</td>
<td>479 (41.3)</td>
<td>602 (51.9)</td>
<td>39 (3.4)</td>
<td>34 (2.9)</td>
<td>5 (0.4)</td>
<td>1159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Enjoy Working with My Co-workers</td>
<td>518 (44.7)</td>
<td>560 (48.4)</td>
<td>50 (4.4)</td>
<td>24 (2.1)</td>
<td>6 (0.5)</td>
<td>1158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Boss is Supportive</td>
<td>484 (42.0)</td>
<td>501 (43.5)</td>
<td>76 (6.6)</td>
<td>64 (5.6)</td>
<td>27 (2.3)</td>
<td>1152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have Too Much Work to Do</td>
<td>212 (18.3)</td>
<td>402 (34.7)</td>
<td>227 (19.7)</td>
<td>288 (24.9)</td>
<td>28 (2.4)</td>
<td>1157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Feel a Sense of Pride in the Work I Do</td>
<td>618 (53.4)</td>
<td>496 (42.8)</td>
<td>31 (2.7)</td>
<td>10 (0.9)</td>
<td>3 (0.3)</td>
<td>1158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Job is Stressful</td>
<td>194 (16.8)</td>
<td>568 (49.1)</td>
<td>122 (10.6)</td>
<td>219 (18.9)</td>
<td>53 (4.6)</td>
<td>1156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are Enough Workers at My Workplace to Deal with the Workload</td>
<td>87 (7.5)</td>
<td>378 (32.7)</td>
<td>91 (7.9)</td>
<td>418 (36.2)</td>
<td>181 (15.7)</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Satisfied with the Amount of Training and Development in Youth Work Issues I Receive</td>
<td>136 (11.8)</td>
<td>521 (45.1)</td>
<td>122 (10.6)</td>
<td>294 (25.4)</td>
<td>83 (7.2)</td>
<td>1156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a Youth Worker, I Feel Supported and Respected by My Local Community</td>
<td>150 (13.0)</td>
<td>593 (51.4)</td>
<td>182 (15.8)</td>
<td>196 (17.0)</td>
<td>33 (2.9)</td>
<td>1154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Satisfied with Future Career Options in the Youth Work Field</td>
<td>139 (12.0)</td>
<td>424 (36.7)</td>
<td>181 (15.7)</td>
<td>301 (26.0)</td>
<td>111 (9.6)</td>
<td>1156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just over half the respondents had worked between two and five years in their current youth work position, and one-quarter had worked less than two years in their current job (54.2% and 24.9% respectively, n=1120).

Just over 5% of respondents had worked in their current job for eleven or more years, where one person had worked for 30 years in the same job.

In addition, most respondents agreed they will still be working in youth work in two years’ time (82.1%, n=1160). By far the two main reasons for this belief were that they will continue to make a difference in the lives of young people (39.2%) and because youth work will still be a challenging and rewarding career (27.9%, n=949). On the other hand, the two most common reasons selected for why workers believe they will no longer be working in the youth work in the next two years were because they think they can get better pay and conditions elsewhere (28.4%) and because they are seeking employment outside of issues related to working with young people (27.9%, n=204).

Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with a number of statements relating to their motivation to keep working in youth work (see Table 8 below). The majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements, where seven of the statements each received agreement from approximately three-quarters of the respondents, and the remaining four statements each received agreement by approximately two-thirds of the respondents. With this in mind, approximately three-quarters of the respondents agreed that they would be more motivated to remain in youth work if they experienced a wider and more challenging range of job activities (72.8%, n=1144 and 72.7%, n=1139 respectively), along with improved:

- access to professional development (74.9%, n=1146)
- wages (73.7%, n=1146)
- relevant education and training (73.3%, n=1140)
- career path options within youth work (71.6%, n=1141)
- professional recognition (70.9%, n=1144)

In addition, approximately two-thirds of the respondents agreed that they would be more motivated to remain in youth work if they experienced improved:

- access to professional support (68.8%, n=1143)
- employment conditions (other than wages and job security) (68.6%, n=1138)
- job security (65.4%, n=1142)
- public perception of youth work (65.4%, n=1144)

### TABLE 8: Rating by surveyed youth workers of motivation to keep working in youth work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>I AGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>TOTAL n =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved wages</td>
<td>399 (34.8)</td>
<td>446 (38.9)</td>
<td>108 (9.4)</td>
<td>161 (14.0)</td>
<td>32 (2.8)</td>
<td>1146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved job security</td>
<td>297 (26.0)</td>
<td>450 (39.4)</td>
<td>191 (16.7)</td>
<td>167 (14.6)</td>
<td>37 (3.2)</td>
<td>1142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other improved employment conditions (other than wages and job security)</td>
<td>268 (23.6)</td>
<td>512 (45.0)</td>
<td>206 (18.1)</td>
<td>135 (11.9)</td>
<td>17 (1.5)</td>
<td>1138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved professional recognition</td>
<td>337 (29.5)</td>
<td>474 (41.4)</td>
<td>171 (14.9)</td>
<td>145 (12.7)</td>
<td>17 (1.5)</td>
<td>1144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved public perception of youth work</td>
<td>297 (26.0)</td>
<td>451 (39.4)</td>
<td>217 (19.0)</td>
<td>163 (14.2)</td>
<td>16 (1.4)</td>
<td>1144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved career path within youth work</td>
<td>327 (28.7)</td>
<td>490 (42.9)</td>
<td>183 (16.0)</td>
<td>127 (11.1)</td>
<td>14 (1.2)</td>
<td>1141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to relevant education and training</td>
<td>272 (23.9)</td>
<td>563 (49.4)</td>
<td>167 (14.6)</td>
<td>132 (11.6)</td>
<td>6 (0.5)</td>
<td>1140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to professional development</td>
<td>289 (25.2)</td>
<td>570 (49.7)</td>
<td>149 (13.0)</td>
<td>130 (11.3)</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
<td>1146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to professional support</td>
<td>253 (22.1)</td>
<td>534 (46.7)</td>
<td>193 (16.9)</td>
<td>150 (13.1)</td>
<td>13 (1.1)</td>
<td>1143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider range of job activities</td>
<td>255 (22.3)</td>
<td>578 (50.5)</td>
<td>177 (15.5)</td>
<td>127 (11.1)</td>
<td>7 (0.6)</td>
<td>1144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More challenging range of job activities</td>
<td>235 (20.6)</td>
<td>593 (52.1)</td>
<td>174 (15.3)</td>
<td>132 (11.6)</td>
<td>5 (0.4)</td>
<td>1139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were also asked to provide a response to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with eleven statements about youth work. These questions were designed to better understand what youth workers across Australia think the role of a youth worker is, and their beliefs about notions of what it means to be a youth worker (see Table 9).

**TABLE 9:** Rating by surveyed youth workers of statements related to youth work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>I AGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE n (%)</th>
<th>I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)</th>
<th>TOTAL n =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANYONE CAN BE A YOUTH WORKER, THERE ARE NO QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED</strong></td>
<td>14 (1.2)</td>
<td>56 (4.8)</td>
<td>60 (5.1)</td>
<td>424 (36.1)</td>
<td>622 (52.9)</td>
<td>1176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORK AND SOCIAL WORK ARE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING</strong></td>
<td>41 (3.5)</td>
<td>194 (16.5)</td>
<td>120 (10.2)</td>
<td>540 (45.9)</td>
<td>281 (23.9)</td>
<td>1176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORKERS CAN BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO MAKE THEM THE BEST THEY CAN BE</strong></td>
<td>639 (54.3)</td>
<td>480 (40.8)</td>
<td>31 (2.6)</td>
<td>25 (2.1)</td>
<td>2 (0.2)</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORKERS ARE THERE TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE OFF THE STREETS</strong></td>
<td>33 (2.8)</td>
<td>231 (19.6)</td>
<td>139 (11.8)</td>
<td>532 (45.2)</td>
<td>242 (20.6)</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORKERS ARE BOUND BY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THEIR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE</strong></td>
<td>759 (64.4)</td>
<td>364 (30.9)</td>
<td>22 (1.9)</td>
<td>26 (2.2)</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
<td>1179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR YOUTH WORK SHOULD BE FORMED IN AUSTRALIA</strong></td>
<td>497 (42.3)</td>
<td>401 (34.1)</td>
<td>133 (11.3)</td>
<td>41 (3.5)</td>
<td>104 (8.8)</td>
<td>1176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORKERS MUST ALWAYS PLACE THE YOUNG PERSON AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR WORK, AS THEIR PRIMARY CLIENT</strong></td>
<td>648 (55.0)</td>
<td>428 (36.3)</td>
<td>34 (2.9)</td>
<td>66 (5.6)</td>
<td>3 (0.3)</td>
<td>1179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORKERS SHOULD INFLUENCE THE CONTEXT SURROUNDING YOUNG PEOPLE’S LIVES (E.G. THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITIES)</strong></td>
<td>331 (28.2)</td>
<td>533 (45.4)</td>
<td>177 (15.1)</td>
<td>125 (10.6)</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
<td>1174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENGAGEMENT IN A YOUTH WORK RELATIONSHIP MUST ALWAYS BE ENTERED INTO VOLUNTARILY BY YOUNG PEOPLE</strong></td>
<td>396 (33.6)</td>
<td>496 (42.1)</td>
<td>79 (6.7)</td>
<td>193 (16.4)</td>
<td>13 (1.1)</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH WORK IS MISUNDERSTOOD AND UNDERVALED BY GOVERNMENTS AND THE GENERAL COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td>656 (55.8)</td>
<td>417 (35.5)</td>
<td>56 (4.8)</td>
<td>42 (3.6)</td>
<td>4 (0.3)</td>
<td>1175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS WOULD NOT DO MUCH TO FOSTER MORE ETHICAL CONDUCT AND PRACTICE BY YOUTH WORKERS</strong></td>
<td>197 (16.7)</td>
<td>157 (13.3)</td>
<td>216 (18.4)</td>
<td>414 (35.2)</td>
<td>193 (16.4)</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding youth work as a profession, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that youth work is misunderstood and undervalued by governments and the general community, whereas less than 4% disagreed (91.3% and 3.9% respectively, n=1175). With this in mind, the respondents were quite certain of their strengths approach to working with young people (95.1% agreed, n=1177), and young person-centred approach, where 91.3% agreed that youth workers must always place the young people at the centre of their work, as their primary client, where only 6% disagreed (5.9%, n=1179).

In addition, 89% of respondents disagreed with the notion that ‘anyone can be a youth worker and there are no qualifications required’ (n=1176). Furthermore, just over two thirds (69.8%, n=1176) felt youth work is distinguishable from social work, (n=1176). When asked if they think a nationwide professional association for youth workers should be formed in Australia, 76.4% agreed with a fairly evenly split between general agreement and strong agreement (42.3% strongly agree and 34.1% agree, n=1176).

When asked about whether youth workers are bound by professional ethics when working with young people, 95.3% agreed, where under two-thirds agreed very much (64.4%), and only 2.9% disagreed (n=1179). Regarding how to foster more ethical conduct and practice, respondents were very divided about whether there is some value in a national code of ethics to foster more ethical conduct and practice by youth workers. Just over half of respondents agreed (51.6%) but 30% believed such a national code would not do much to foster more ethical conduct and practice, and 18.4% respondents had no opinion on the matter (n=1177). Furthermore, there was a strong underpinning principle of client voluntarism, where just over three quarters of respondents (75.7%) agreed that engagement in a youth work relationship must always be entered into voluntarily by young people, where 17.5% disagreed (n=1177).

Regarding the role youth workers have with young people, almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that youth workers should influence the context surrounding young people’s lives, such as their family, friends and community (73.6%), where 15.1% had no opinion of this (n=1174). Finally, 65.8% disagreed that one role of youth workers is to keep young people off the streets, where 22.4% agreed (n=1177).
THE FOLLOWING REPORTS THE FINDINGS OF THE SINGLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION IN THE SURVEY, WHICH ASKED PARTICIPANTS TO COMMENT ON WHAT THEY THOUGHT COULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR WORKERS IN THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR IN AUSTRALIA. EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY EIGHT PEOPLE RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION AND THEIR COMMENTS COVERED A RANGE OF TOPICS REGARDING YOUNG PEOPLE, YOUTH WORKERS AND THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR NATIONALLY. SEVEN COMMENTS DID NOT RELATE TO THE QUESTION SO WERE NOT USED IN THE ANALYSIS.

Recurring issues for improvement related to the need for greater recognition and respect for what youth workers do and how they do it. As noted by one worker, “youth workers aren’t taken very seriously”. When discussing concerns around such ideas, many respondents agreed that even though the work they undertake is complex, challenging, requires specialised skills and knowledge, and is valuable to Australian society; it is not well understood, and is rarely acknowledged as such. Many also commented on how a more planned, supportive, needs-focused and better-resourced approach to youth work throughout all of Australia would better support a sustainable sector and workforce. A key theme related to workforce sustainability involved discussion around the need for the establishment of a national youth sector body to meet these concerns and support the sector to be better recognised, respected and sustainable. Discussion of this proposed initiative will occur independently of the other issues of workforce sustainability raised.

Young people today are more highly at risk, more complex and further isolated by the expectations of today’s society and the technology that sees some losing their face-to-face communication skills. (respondent 50)

Many respondents noted that youth work is diverse and specialised, being more than focused merely on the welfare needs of at risk young people. They argued that youth work involves working with young people across the risk continuum (from low to high), and, more broadly, across...
Many people have stated to me that there is no way they could do the work I do... meaning work with the young people I work with. Young people push people's buttons with their challenging behaviour and this can scare other people. This fear is extended at times to the people who work with youth.

(Respondent 891)

Others tied the valuable function of youth work in Australian society to the preventative role it plays in reducing the need for more intense and expensive services when young people who have missed out on support early in the development of challenges and stressors and begin to behave in socially unacceptable ways, for example,

[Youth workers] know the benefits of community/family connectedness but the public at large don’t … realise how youth workers can work as conduits or connectors in the lives of [young people] decreasing isolation, role modelling, believing in them and working with each one individually for the best outcome of each one.

(Respondent 649)

Some respondents also tied the importance and value of youth work to a generally held negative perception about young people, lack of understanding of the increased complexity of modern life for young people, and difficulties young people have dealing with these complexities, such as,

More awareness on the issues that our young people face today, more acceptance, less judging and acknowledgement for who they are. Too often, I see 2 major issues with the young people I work with, mental health issues and victims of severe bullying, this is damaging and takes a lot of hard work to overcome on my clients behalf, if at all. I think parents and teachers need more awareness of the issues our kids face today and young people need to be taught empathy and acceptance, kindness and some boundaries...We need to work together as a society and as a community to see that our kids get the best start in life as possible.

(Respondent 392)

My experience is that many young people are overwhelmed with the transition from home and school into work and developing independence. Often the stress of circumstances and the lack of appropriate support services makes it difficult to see or plan for a future.

(Respondent 43)

Youth these days seem to have to grow up a lot quicker than they should and have a lot more responsibilities and I'm not sure that they will become the Adults that are needed to grow our community if they don't get the right support and guidance.

(Respondent 599)

Furthermore, respondents argued that poor perception and respect stems from a misperception amongst members of the community, social and human services profession and government that youth workers are not knowledgeable, skilled, committed or professionals, and that how they look and what they do with young people is not appropriate. This was summed up the following way by respondent 524,

I guess all the recommendations I have made stem back to “public” perception of what we ACTUALLY do. It just needs more coverage and explanation, and the understanding that just because some of us don’t “look” like professionals, does not mean we’re not. It is even harder to allow your dress code and appearance to reflect that (i.e. jeans and T-Shirt, instead of a suit). The reason many of us choose to dress this way is so we don’t intimidate our clients, as many of them already have low self-esteem and the stigma attached to suits for our clients’ age group is a huge barrier to overcome. So, we dress to make our clients feel more comfortable, and that we are working and talking WITH them, not AT them! I have found personally, because of my choice to dress in a more approachable way, that I often

A number of respondents also argued that they believe that youth work is not highly valued by members of the Australian community despite it being “vital to young people’s success through the continued support [youth workers] offer”. Others argued that youth workers “assist young people to make thoughtful decisions to improve their position in society”, and play a “role in assisting young people to be able to make sense and meaning of their lives”. One worker further sums up these sentiments as follows,

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get looked down upon by others within my organisation, and other organisations, and therefore I am valued as “less” professional then they are. Perception of appearance is why most youth have “barriers” and that is why most of us Youth Workers, have a job. So, if we can attempt to again, explain, and point out why and how we do what we do, people might eventually learn not to judge a book by its cover, and one day we might be out of job.

In addition, some tied such misperception of youth work to misunderstanding about, and attitude towards, young people general across the Australian community. They argued that a change in this perception would help youth workers feel more recognised, supported and valued as professionals, for example,

Investment in young people themselves will lead to improved conditions for workers. It’s pointless to try and improve conditions for workers and the sector without first improving perceptions of young people first and demonstrating that they are worthy members of society and worth investing in.

(respondent 532)

Many also argued that how media outlets portray young people affects the perception of community members. Positive representations can be helpful for youth workers, and can be influenced by them, for example, as noted by respondent 891,

I have been blamed for the poor behaviour of young people. When I have named this and have been actively placing articles in the local media I have gained support and opened conversation.

However, negative representations of young people in the media can be very damaging, for example,

I think the issue [about the way youth work is perceived] is deeper. The perception of ‘youth’ by those in the community is often stereotypical and distorted due to the bad media young people get and all that is mainly reported. This then skew people’s perception of a ‘youth worker’.

(respondent 241)

Respondents who discussed such issues regarding government representatives and policy makers argued that misrecognition and poor support becomes apparent through limited opportunities for young people and youth workers to genuinely engage with government decision makers and advocate for the needs of young people. The consequences of this include decisions around policy, legislation and resourcing of service programs that do not satisfactorily meet young people’s needs and do not adequately resource the Youth Work sector to implement the decisions. This particularly relates to limited focus within government on preventative solutions and unrealistic expectations of what is actually required to build relationships with, and improve the lives of, disadvantaged young people. As noted by respondent 760,

Government policy needs to recognise the essential service that is provided by youth workers that builds young people into contributing members of society and greatly reducing the cost burden of the state in areas such a justice and health. Recognition of the contribution and importance of the preventative role should be incorporated into policy that recognises and funds youth workers as well as encourages other government-funded programs and agencies to co-

operate with youth services and see their role as important within the context of their own operations as well.

Some respondents noted that one way in which governments could better support the Youth Work sector, and provide more appropriate recognition of the complexity and diversity of the work, is through changing the way in which administrative roles seem to be given priority over relationship building and service delivery activities. This comes about through increased expectation by governments that youth workers engage in administration, such as meeting complex and multiple reporting requirements, yet not providing additional funding to conduct such activities. This means that workers must allocate time to such administrative roles and away from working directly with young people. Respondents agreed that some administration is necessary but that better balance is required, for example,

The move by government to offload responsibility to the NGO sector is prohibitive and in some instances is creating “accountant” rather than support workers. Acknowledging that each individual client or young person is unique and cannot fit into pre-determined boxes for analysis or “statistics” would be a major “strengths based” breakthrough. My experience suggests that young people in stress and or social trauma, need more time and empathy rather than being reduced to numbers to be entered into reporting frameworks!

(respondent 387)

IT’S WRONG THAT WE HAVE TARGET FIGURES TO MEET AS IT’S ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE’S LIVES NOT NUMBERS. TOO MUCH RED TAPE. TOO MANY HOURS IN FRONT OF A COMPUTER. MONEY BEING WASTED IN THE WRONG AREAS.

(RESPONDENT 555)
Following on from the sentiments of this worker, some respondents also noted that what they see as an increasingly bureaucratised nature of youth work is actually discouraging relationship building, as noted in the following response,

Moreover, relationship and human engagement (love and care) is the basis of good youth work I think. Bureaucracy, as well as disproportionate administration and/or record keeping practices, can be hugely detrimental to the core business of relating and human engagement. So, this needs to be constantly kept in check and balanced carefully. Administrating is servant of caring for the needy (core purpose, master), not the other way around.

(respondent 439)

Underpinning such concerns is a perception that government representatives do not fully appreciate the work that youth workers do or what young people need. This results in them developing unrealistic expectations of youth workers and increasingly expecting youth workers to both operate and be accountable in ways that are inflexible, unrealistic and not related to young people’s needs. According to some workers, it has even gotten to the point where some organisations are unable to employ staff at the times when young people are available, or prefer to access services, and that workers are not allowed to work where young people tend to congregate. All of these substantially reduce opportunities available to work with young people. Such sentiments are summed up as follows,

[Improvements will come through] better funding aimed at meeting young people’s needs as opposed to meeting a community outcome (eg. funding to work one on one with young people to achieve goals instead of throwing small amounts of money at someone to work on an urban art project where the only aim is to get young people off the street, to reduce crime for that brief period they involved in the activity or out of view of the general public). (respondent 484)

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We need ability and freedom to work more on what young people want to do rather than what funding providers or managers who are not even in touch with the young people think we should do.

(Respondent 550)

Minimise the red tape around funding and the administrative tasks that is demanded by funding bodies. Give youth workers more freedom to cater youth programs according to the needs of the local youth they work with NOT according to the needs of their funding bodies. (respondent 477)

Regarding professionals in the social and human services sector, respondents reported there is limited recognition of youth workers as professionals and of the value of the work that youth workers do. The workers reported that this disrespectful and superior attitude, as it is perceived, leads to difficulties engaging in genuine collaborative relationships with other professionals when trying to advocate for young people. It also leads to a general feeling summed up in the following way,

I have on occasion had the statement “oh, are you just a youth worker” directed at me by other professionals who see themselves and their qualifications as superior. I feel that improving recognition of youth work as a profession would assist

in dealing with other professionals and advocating for our clients. (respondent 425)

In addition, some respondents singled out members of management within the Youth Work sector itself as having a problematic attitude towards youth work, particularly where youth work programs coexist with generalist organisations and managers are overseeing all aspects of the organisation.
WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY

The second area around which respondents raised issues and ideas for improvement related to sustainability of the Youth Work sector across Australia.

Broadly, respondents were concerned with the need for the Youth Work sector to develop a collective professional identity distinct from other sectors within the social and human services workforce, including how to achieve this. Other ideas related to workforce sustainability revolved around the need for more holistic and planned approach to service delivery, and suggestions of a range of ideas on how to support the workforce to achieve this.

COLLECTIVE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

At the moment many workers do not consider themselves as youth workers despite engaging with young people. It is concerning to me that there is lack of collective identity among sector workers, despite their common interest of working with and for young people.

(respondent 1)

The need for development of a collective professional identity is evident in the contradictory comments about the current professional nature of youth work throughout Australia. While there were many responses criticising the poor state of professionalism there were also many declaring the professionalism present throughout the workforce. Despite this, many did note that one way to improve recognition, worker quality and working conditions would be to develop a collective professional identity of youth work across Australia. Many respondents argued that without this the Australian Youth Work sector is vulnerable, and will continue to feel the kinds of issues related to misrecognition and lack of respect and support previously outlined.

A number of people argued that a nationally agreed definition of youth work is an important aspect of a collective identity. They argued that a definition should include a more coherent description of what youth workers do, and with whom, than currently exists, and that it should include how youth workers are distinguishable from other workers operating in the social and human services sector. Another factor related to the development of a collective professional identity includes building a sense of what it means to be a youth worker. This will include agreeing on what a career in youth work might entail, and what must occur to work together on issues related to the Youth Work sector and working with young people.

A HOLISTIC AND PLANNED APPROACH TO SERVICE DELIVERY

A more strategic approach [would improve the youth work sector]. It’s very ‘bitsy’ with many organisations getting a small amount of funding to do little projects or provide basic services - often they don’t even know what each other are doing. There is no incentive to partner as everyone is concerned about grant opportunities and staying afloat! It is not the creative or innovative environment I expected. There is a feeling of exhaustion and hopelessness. It can be quite depressing and wearing on full time staff, especially because they are usually quite driven which can over time lead to burn out.

(respondent 790)

Many respondents called for improvement to the youth sector across Australia through taking more of a holistically planned and appropriately resourced approach than currently exists. This stems from a belief that the current approach to delivering youth work nationally is not well coordinated and mainly focused on crisis mitigation. Respondents called for an approach that considers appropriately funded prevention and early intervention approaches, which are long term if required. Specifically respondents requested “whole population approaches” and, as previously noted, that there be greater recognition that youth workers should be funded and supported to work with all young people, not only those most disadvantaged.

Those commenting on such matters linked better support for prevention and early intervention services, including family support, to improved educational and employment outcomes and lower involvement in crime for young people. This includes greater support for generalist youth services to complement programs focused on particular needs, as noted by respondent 71,

There needs to be more funding for all facets of youth work across the continuum from prevention (alternative recreational opportunities, youth spaces, music, celebration events, mental health promotion etc), to tertiary responses to young people with complex issues and crisis services, including reinstating youth generalist support positions that are not issue bound.

Foundational to the success of such an approach was improved funding of the sector, particularly in terms of increased long term and core funding to employ more staff and fund service delivery that is relevant to young people’s needs, and improving the way in which staff are supported.

FUNDING

Underpinning all concerns and suggestions related to workforce sustainability was a clear message that youth work in Australia is seriously underfunded, for example,

The current economic climate and funding restrictions have placed a lot of pressure on services and youth workers.
Programs have been defunded and left gaps in services that are trying to be filled by other existing services that are already overloaded and short of resources. This inhibits the ability of workers and services to provide the most effective services for clients and may lead to reduced outcomes for clients. Resourcing services in the youth work sector can assist to address issues experienced by young people and can lead to positive outcomes for youth, their families and the community as a whole (respondent 178)

The three main factors related to funding were the need for more staff to be employed, changing from short term project based funding to long term program (core) funding, and providing more funds to provide direct services to young people to meet their needs. Some respondents raised concerns that more long term funding is essential as the current approach to project only funding does not allow services to establish a long term and stable presence in the community.

Respondents argued that poor funding of a short term nature leads to overworked workers, which can lead to a great number of other issues such as:

- workers feeling increasingly stressed and overwhelmed, which leads to burnout and high turnover rates
- increased numbers of staff conducting unpaid overtime
- organisations hiring staff who are inexperienced, poor quality and do not have appropriate qualifications
- breakdown in relationships between organisations and community members due to poor quality staff and high turnover (particularly in remote Aboriginal communities)
- experience and knowledge being lost from the sector
- higher costs to organisations stuck in a cycle of recruiting and retraining new staff
- workers feeling stressed due to impermanent employment status which lowers their capacity to engage in personal life-planning (for example with respect to their own families and acquiring housing stability themselves)
- limited capacity to build networks and conduct community development, which are important to building capacity in communities so they can feel empowered to meet their own needs
- focusing on funding not working with young people

These issues are particularly striking in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. For example, respondent 4 noted that the situation is so dire in these areas a solution is to fund “a network of respite youth workers who are willing to come to communities so the permanent youth workers can take a break without the whole program stopping or falling down!” Other solutions mainly involved calls for governments to better fund the sector through longer term funding contracts and more realistic allocation of funds; however, a few respondents suggested the sector needs better ways to reduce reliance on government and become self-funded instead, for example,

FUNDING IS ALWAYS AN ISSUE. YOU CAN WORK IN A PROGRAM, ACHIEVE GREAT RESULTS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION AND THEN FUNDING IS CUT, AND VALUABLE EMPLOYEES ARE LOST. THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE FOCUS ON ORGANISATIONS BECOMING SELF-SUSTAINING AND NOT RELYING ON FUNDING. (RESPONDENT 483)
According to respondents, management and support for workers operate at a number of levels, including traditional supervision to ensure emotional care of workers, administrative support and educational development. It is important to note that many respondents commented that current supervision models only focus on administrative supervision and performance management, and that they are poorly supported with respect to their emotional care and educational development.

According to some respondents, a type of supervision that supports their emotional wellbeing involves supervisors being clear about their expectations of workers, and of what workers are supposed to be doing, but that this does not happen as much as they need. Some respondents also commented that it would be emotionally supportive to receive more time to recover from stressful workplace situations, as noted by respondent 671,

*Sometimes the job is difficult because we are here to assist the [young people] to teach them independent living and they see it as us against them and feel we are telling what to do. As most teenagers they don’t like to be told to do things. We are constantly thinking of new ideas to get them to achieve and complete tasks without being told. They also have slight disability through trauma which is another reason they don’t understand we are coming from a good place. The battle can wear you down at times. Self-care and time away allows us workers to revitalise and realise why we are in this line of work.*

Others noted that recovery time should be additional to their sick leave allocation, especially under extreme circumstances, such as noted by respondent 150,

*(respondent 150)*

In addition, it would help if emotionally supportive supervision were easily accessible and free, or at least subsidised, provided by supervisors with youth work experience, and by supervisors independent of the organisation. Workers located in remote Australia noted that such supervision is very difficult to access and that it would help if there were a network of supervisors they could call upon to visit them, or whom they could access online. Finally, regarding supervision, respondents noted that supervisors and managers (including management committee members) should be educated in the importance of supportive supervision and develop skills in this type of supervision. This is summed up by respondent 886, who argued,

*Many youth workers move on and change roles, as the work is challenging and stressful and often unrecognised by employers, hence a lack of support or emphasis on supervision and professional development. This can also filter down from unrealistic government expectations on what it takes to improve the lives of disadvantaged young people. Most case management roles have a significant staff turnover for these reasons. Youth workers recognise this and move on or don’t recognise this and suffer burn out / breakdown.*

As noted, supporting workers is important for reducing worker stress, burnout and turnover. Respondents raised a number of issues related to worker support. These included how the workforce is managed and remunerated, and what exists to support peer-to-peer relationships and career development.
REMUNERATION – PAY AND CONDITIONS

Many respondents commenting on ways to improve the Youth Work sector noted the need for better remuneration, in terms of pay and working conditions.

These workers mentioned the very low pay levels for youth workers and how this acts as a disincentive to well qualified and experienced people entering and remaining long term in youth work, for example,

In any youth organisation I have worked for or interacted with, the turnover rate is unbelievably high - one reason for this is the poor pay conditions. People have to move onwards and upwards to jobs that pay better. Youth workers can spend hours motivating young people to find careers that they will be able to support themselves on - and yet, youth workers struggle themselves in their chosen career. (respondent 180)

Many also reported concerns about pay discrepancies both across Australia and across different sectors within youth work, in particular higher rates of pay in government organisations compared to non-government, as follows,

There is a large discrepancy between the wages and conditions of Youth Workers employed directly through local government and those employed by organisations sub-contracted by local government to provide youth services. My current youth work role, in a sub-contracted organisation, pays $55,000 a year. The same role in another municipality pays between $71 and 77,000. In addition, the programs attached to local government are better funded and are generally better staffed. I do not begrudge those in council positions their salaries, and salary is far from my primary reason for choosing to pursue youth work as a vocation, however this discrepancy does illustrate the relative perceived value of the role in different areas. (respondent 936)

Respondents also noted discrepancies between youth worker and other jobs within the social and human services sector, for example,

Even within a Community service department Youth Workers get paid less and are entitled to less perks than other workers (ie Community development officers). This makes you think that your profession is not regarded as being as important (respondent 299)

THE WAGES ARE NEARLY 20 THOUSAND DOLLARS BELOW SOCIAL WORK WAGES. I HAVE WORKED CLOSELY WITH SOCIAL WORKER AND I CAN HONESTLY SAY THE WORK I DO ON A DAILY BASIS IS JUST AS STRESSFUL AND COMPLEX AS THE WORK OF SOCIAL WORKERS. I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE EXTREME VARIATIONS IN WAGES FOR THESE PROFESSIONS. (RESPONDENT 320)

Repercussions of low pay rates include increased stress and poor health outcomes amongst youth workers due to increased difficulty providing for the basic living needs of their families, reduced ability to acquire housing loans, concerns about a substandard retirement experience due to poor superannuation accumulation. Respondents also argued that low pay rates lead to high turnover within organisations, which is also stressful for workers who have to adapt to constant staff change and but also who see poor outcomes for young people using the service. Suggestions for improving these issues include standardising the types of youth work jobs that operate across Australia and paying workers in similar positions the same regardless of the type of organisation (that is, “national pay grades” and a “more universal pay scale”). Another suggestion includes ensuring pay reflects the complexity, stress and difficulty of youth work, as well as the level of qualifications and years of experience of youth workers, in similar ways to other workers in the social and human services sector.

Improved pay was not the only remuneration factor raised by respondents. Additionally, some respondents commented that support comes through improved workplace flexibility and benefits. Suggestions for workplace flexibility included flexible working hours, shift hours that provide more opportunities to engage in out of work activities and swap shifts with colleagues and providing time to prepare activities separate from face to face contact with young people. Respondents also made a number of suggestions for improving the kind of benefits that youth workers receive as a way to support workers to lower stress levels and prevent burnout, such as,

• Extending annual leave beyond four weeks per year, allocating additional hours to sick leave and developing a system where entitlements such as long service leave is transferable between jobs
• Providing penalty rates for late night work
• Providing overtime for crisis management
• Mandating breaks during day shifts
• Fairer remuneration for time in lieu
• Designated sleep areas for shift workers
• Sleepover workers being paid for this time while at work (where the example was given that on call workers are paid while they sleep but even though sleepover workers are on call they are not paid likewise)
• Annual flights to return to family (as noted by one worker from a remote location)
Some workers noted that strong professional networks would support youth workers. Suggestions included having increased opportunities to build national networks and exchange ideas with youth workers on innovative ways to work with young people, as well as mentor and support each other. These respondents argued that increased collegiality and networking would help counter the competitive culture, which they are increasingly experiencing in youth work, and which, they argue, is detrimental to the Youth Work sector and to a building strong service sector for young people. This is particularly important for workers in regional and remote areas. Furthermore, respondents noted that it is very important that workers are given time to be involved in such initiatives so that they are not burdened further, and so that the young people using the programs are not losing services. Some also noted they would like similar opportunities to build relationships with professionals from other sectors with whom they share clients. Others also argued that building stronger links with workers both inside and outside of the Youth Work sector would help build understanding, acknowledgement, respect and trust. In turn, this would support youth workers to practice in supportive ways, learn new skills and share knowledge about successful practice. Suggestions included achieving this through face-to-face collaborative and networking opportunities but also through developing online forums and a national database about successful and unsuccessful practice.

Regarding the perceived competitive culture, respondents argued for a non-competitive approach to funding, where funding becomes organised in a way that encourages collaboration not competition, as noted by respondent 747,

"Often the funding of the youth work field makes us compete against each other to receive funding and this has resulted in every agency working for themselves instead of collaboratively. At the end of the day if there is no funding coming into an agency then how can they continue to provide services to young people. Ideally, it would be great if the way the youth work field is funded is changed to encourage collaboration in the industry."
Building on these ideas, some respondents also argued more action is required to develop a structured career pathway in youth work, which will involve both opportunities for career planning but also ongoing professional development.

In summary, respondents who raised this were concerned that youth work operates in an ad hoc way and that career progression involves moving from direct work with young people to management positions where few opportunities exist for experienced youth workers to continue working with young people. Issues raised include:

- Concerns that direct work with young people is somehow regarded as lower quality work than management
- A sense that remaining in direct work with young people gets to a point where it is repetitive and no longer challenging
- A pervasive idea that youth work is considered a stepping stone to a career, not a career itself

Respondents further argue that a way to ensure seamless service delivery to young people requires both generalist and specialised training, that time off to attend is provided, and that workers are replaced with other workers when they attend. Workers in remote locations also noted that it is very important that the professional development they access is relevant to their unique circumstances and that it has a view of engaging and up-skilling people who live in remote communities to work in youth work, as noted,

I am of the opinion that the future of youth work is seriously at risk in particular in Aboriginal communities. There is a dire need to ensure that professional development of youth workers is relevant to the target client group e.g. remote communities is a specialise [sic] area, therefore growing local youth workers is crucial to the development of remote youth service provision.

(Respondent 903)

Ideas for training needs include:

- Cross cultural issues
- Difficult issues young people experience
- Working with young people from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, including using traditional languages when working with young people who speak traditional languages
- Building knowledge specific to local and regional issues
- Values and beliefs
- Changes to government benefits and government policy
- Mental health counselling (accidental counselling) for young people
- Life skills development for young people
- Family inclusion and family work with young people
- Demographic changes related to young people
- Climate change and how it affects young people (i.e. stress and anxiety)
- “Youth work 101” for new youth workers

Suggestions include providing “opportunities to cross youth sectors for different youth work career options” and “clearer career paths between non-government and government”. One example of such crossover involves secondary education departments funding youth work positions in school to support teachers to focus on educational outcomes while the youth workers support students’ social welfare needs (an example of prevention/early intervention). Suggestions also include providing training that develops in complexity according to years of experience (i.e. the idea that one size does not fit all), and a “clear promotion strategy” that actively seeks to maintain a sector of workers with varying years of experience. Central to this is better access to relevant and career long professional development training, where many respondents noted the importance of ongoing professional development to a strong, knowledgeable and competent workforce. This may include conferences, training events/workshops, and online packages. Furthermore, many respondents argued that while more opportunities to engage in ongoing training throughout a youth work career are required, this needs to accommodate a wide variety of knowledge, skill levels and years of experience. In line with this,

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

I AM OF THE OPINION THAT THE FUTURE OF YOUTH WORK IS SERIOUSLY AT RISK IN PARTICULAR IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES. THERE IS A DIRE NEED TO ENSURE THAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH WORKERS IS RELEVANT TO THE TARGET CLIENT GROUP.

(Respondent 903)
ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL YOUTH SECTOR ORGANISATION

Many respondents suggested that the establishment of a national organisation would achieve both recognition/respect and workforce sustainability.

According to one worker, the sector requires,

**A STRONGER PROFESSIONAL ADVOCACY BODY THAT WAS BETTER FUNDED AND THEREFORE MORE ABLE TO LIFT THE PROFILE OF YOUTH ISSUES AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORKERS ACROSS AUSTRALIA. [IT WILL] FOCUS ON HIGHLIGHTING THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH A YOUTH WORK PRACTICE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE’S DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS TO SERVICES AND COMMUNITY.**

*(RESPONDENT 1076)*

Focusing exclusively on matters relating to the Youth Work sector, the many agreed that this association would provide:

- leadership to develop a collective youth work professional identity across Australia,
- a quality assurance function through developing national standards and accreditation for youth workers,
- strong representation and validation of the Youth Work sector, and
- support for workers

Respondents argued that leadership to develop a collective youth work professional identity across Australia would address the kinds of issues raised previously under the relevant heading. Regarding a quality assurance function, there was opinion that the national organisation would work collaboratively with the sector to develop and monitor professional standards and accreditation models for youth workers, organisations and higher educational institutions. This would include developing nationally recognised professional standards in different types of youth work which relate to concerns about, but not limited to: ethical behaviour; staff/young person ratios; pay and working conditions; uniforms (or advocating for tax credits where uniforms are not appropriate); practice issues/policies; and, minimum qualifications and ongoing professional development. This organisation would achieve these functions in ways similar to other professional associations such as the Australian Association of Social Workers and the Australian Psychological Society.

Respondents argued that strong representation and validation of the Youth Work sector would occur through the national organisation, being an independent body that uses this position to lobby government on behalf of youth workers. Respondents listed many possible functions for the national organisation, as noted below, however it is unclear from the data how these functions might be shared between a youth work association and the work currently being undertaken by AYAC as the national youth affairs peak.

Respondents who discussed the national organisation for youth work proposed that the organisation would advocate for the Youth Work sector and raise the profile of youth workers and young people across Australia. It would also provide a strong voice and preferred direction on policy and funding decisions, and defend the rights and roles of youth workers.

Other roles suggested include using events, campaigns, research, news and social media and advertising to educate Australians (both inside and outside of the Youth Work sector) about youth work. This would involve building a strong evidence base for what youth work approaches provide the best outcomes for young people and disseminating this information throughout Australia. Finally, support for workers would involve facilitating high quality, affordable and accessible training and networking opportunities to youth workers across Australia. Suggested activities for achieving this include regular conferences and via online forums where youth workers can connect with each other and discuss important and relevant practice issues and ideas.

However, despite strong support for such an organisation, some respondents also raised reservations, for example,

*Unfortunately the sector is very fragmented, it covers many work situations and numerous unions/EBA’s. This is problematic when consolidating a sector wide approach. Efforts to form a single association such as Social Work is an obvious path - however, this path is fraught…My fear is that this level of coordination and collaboration between education providers and the sector employers is a bridge too far.*

*(respondent 942)*

*I think for Government and non-government stakeholders to recognise that Youth work needs to be flexible to suit the needs of the youth, the family and wider community. It needs to be culturally appropriate to the people and community in which you are working. For example, someone in Tasmania may face similar issues as a youth worker in remote Northern Territory however, the response and ways of handling it as a whole may be completely different. I guess my concern is around a national approach. One mould does not suit all. Our communities are as varied as the youth we work with.*

*(respondent 817)*
Conclusion

In conclusion, of the 1185 respondents sufficiently completing the survey, it is clear that their work is underpinned by strengths-based, young people-centred and voluntary practice principles, and is strongly sociological (including ecological) in its approach to practice with young people.

These quantitative findings need to be considered in light of the more in depth qualitative responses ascertained from the question on how to improve conditions for youth workers in the sector. Almost 900 youth workers from an array of urban and rural areas across Australia responded to a question asking for ideas on how to improve conditions for workers in the Youth Work sector in Australia. From these responses, it is clear that developing a professional identity underpins many of their ideas relating to how to improve their conditions. In particular, they argued that recognition as professionals is an important way to improve the level of respect they receive. They also believe that this will translate to youth workers receiving more support, better remuneration and work conditions, and youth work becoming a better funded, more secure and sustainable profession. Respondents would like to see members of the general community, all levels of government and professionals throughout the social and human services sector across Australia acknowledge the complexity and unique nature of youth work. This includes recognising the knowledge and skills youth workers bring to carry out their work. Respondents would also like to see greater recognition of the value of youth work to the Australian community, especially regarding the prevention and early intervention activities they perform with young people.

Finally, many respondents argued that establishing a national youth work body, such as a professional association, is an important way to achieve this. However, it should be noted there were a number of respondents who stated reservations around the establishment of a national youth work association, and it is unclear what the relationship of the organisation would be with existing bodies, such as AYAC as the national youth affairs peak. Notwithstanding these caveats, a national youth work association would improve the status of youth work in Australia and would lead attempts to develop a professional youth work identity, establish and maintain professional standards throughout the sector, represent the interests of youth workers, drive awareness raising of what youth workers do and build a more widespread sense of collegiality and support amongst youth workers across Australia.